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## **Ingersoll Lectures on Immortality**

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IMMORTALITY AND THE NEW THEODICY. By  
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HUMAN IMMORTALITY. Two supposed Objections  
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DIONYSOS AND IMMORTALITY: The Greek Faith  
in Immortality as affected by the rise of Individual-  
ism. By President BENJAMIN IDE WHEELER. 1898.

THE CONCEPTION OF IMMORTALITY. By Pro-  
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LIFE EVERLASTING. By JOHN FISKE, LL.D. 1900.

SCIENCE AND IMMORTALITY. By WILLIAM OSLER,  
M. D., LL. D. 1904.

THE ENDLESS LIFE. By SAMUEL M. CROTHERS,  
D. D. 1905.

INDIVIDUALITY AND IMMORTALITY. By Professor  
WILHELM OSTWALD. 1906.

THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY. By CHARLES F.  
DOLE. 1907.

BUDDHISM AND IMMORTALITY. By WILLIAM S.  
BIGELOW, M. D. 1908.

IS IMMORTALITY DESIRABLE? By G. LOWES  
DICKINSON, Fellow of King's College, Cambridge.  
1909.

EGYPTIAN CONCEPTIONS OF IMMORTALITY.  
By GEORGE A. REISNER. 1911.

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY IN THE SON-  
NETS OF SHAKESPEARE. By George H. Palmer.  
1912.

HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
BOSTON AND NEW YORK

INTIMATIONS OF IMMORTALITY  
IN THE  
SONNETS OF SHAKSPERE

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The Ingersoll Lecture, 1912

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IN THE SONNETS OF  
SHAKSPERE

BY

GEORGE HERBERT PALMER



BOSTON AND NEW YORK  
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY  
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## THE INGERSOLL LECTURESHIP


*Extract from the will of Miss Caroline  
Haskell Ingersoll, who died in  
Keene, County of Cheshire,  
New Hampshire, Jan.  
26, 1893.*

FIRST. In carrying out the wishes of my late beloved father, George Goldthwait Ingersoll, as declared by him in his last will and testament, I give and bequeath to Harvard University in Cambridge, Mass., where my late father was graduated, and which he always held in love and honor, the sum of Five thousand

dollars (\$5,000) as a fund for the establishment of a Lectureship on a plan somewhat similar to that of the Dudleian lecture, that is — one lecture to be delivered each year, on any convenient day between the last day of May and the first day of December, on this subject, “the Immortality of Man,” said lecture not to form a part of the usual college course, nor to be delivered by any Professor or Tutor as part of his usual routine of instruction, though any such Professor or Tutor may be appointed to such service. The choice of said lecturer is not to be limited to any one religious denomination, nor to any one profession, but may be that of either clergyman or layman, the appointment to take place at least six months before the delivery of said lecture. The above sum to be safely invested and three fourths of the annual interest thereof to be paid to the lecturer for his services

and the remaining fourth to be expended in the publishment and gratuitous distribution of the lecture, a copy of which is always to be furnished by the lecturer for such purpose. The same lecture to be named and known as "the Ingersoll lecture on the Immortality of Man."





# Intimations of Immortality in the Sonnets of Shakspeare

**A**N annual lecture on a single topic can hardly escape a certain sameness. To secure variety this sagacious foundation provides that "the choice of the lecturer is not to be limited to any one religious denomination nor to any one profession, but may be that of either clergyman or layman." On this broad platform agnostics and believers have equal rights. An Ingersoll lecturer defends or denounces whatever conception of immortality interests him. He may treat it as history or dogma, a necessity of human thought

or an aberration of some particular time, place, or person. The whole field of selection is open, the only demands being candor, scholarship, and power of presentation. Yet notwithstanding these wise provisions for diversity, the twelve lectures already given largely agree. On the whole, and with a few partial exceptions, immortality has in them a definite meaning and is held to be highly probable. And how could it be otherwise? Truth is one, error many. A group of eager explorers, all stirred by the single desire to know what the facts are, must tend to some uniformity of result. That is the justification of intellectual freedom. Its issue is not looseness, but solidity.

But this creditable state of harmony brings me embarrassment. I accepted



appointment as an Ingersoll lecturer because I believe that faith in individual immortality is one of "the mighty hopes that make us men"; that without it our present life loses intelligibility; that belief in mortality is far more credulous than belief in immortality; and that those who suppose they accept extinction are generally able to do so only through using such personal ideas as really imply continuous existence. This, my individual creed, I thought to set forth in systematic form, comparing the considerable evidence against it with that in its favor and seeing whether, when fully displayed, its reasonings bring the same conviction to others as to myself. But I was imprudent enough to look over the addresses of my pre-

decessors and received a check. I found that pretty much all I planned to say had already been said, and on several occasions with greater force and beauty than I can command. The speakers with whom I have closest sympathy are Dickinson, Dole, Fiske, Gordon, and Royce. I was still further deterred by a book recently published by Professor William Adams Brown, of Union Theological Seminary, entitled "The Christian Hope." This in my judgment is a little masterpiece, making superfluous for the present any other vindication of the claims of immortality. Within two hundred pages he marshals the converging evidence — psychological, metaphysical, moral, historical — with extraordinary acumen,

learning, and impartiality, exaggerating nothing, belittling nothing, giving full weight to counter-considerations and insistently recognizing the limitations of knowledge. A more convincing and attractive study of the subject I have never met.

In view, then, of the already large body of writing in which my own beliefs are admirably set forth, I abandon the theoretic discussion of immortality and turn to examine an instance which long ago struck me in English literature, where the massive truth naïvely discloses its varied meanings and practical import. In thus limiting myself to a historic treatment I am not without warrant of my predecessors, one of whom showed how immortality revealed itself to the

early Greeks, another how it was held by the Egyptians, another still how little physical science can offer on either side of the question; such digressions from the straight argumentative road lend variety and freshness to our course. My subject, "Intimations of Immortality in the Sonnets of Shakspeare," blends with the central religious theme interests of an ethical, historical, and literary nature.

But since the extraordinary literary merits of the Sonnets must here be unduly subordinated to certain hitherto unconsidered ethical aspects, I wish to pause a moment and interject a paragraph of homage to the Sonnets as pure poetry. My personal debt to them in this regard is large. In my early manhood a friend lived with me

who was as greedy as I of sweet sounds and delicate diction. We made a compact that each of us should repeat one of these Sonnets each morning at breakfast, explaining what he had found in it worthy of remark. We chose them merely in the order of our liking. In this way, during the otherwise unprofitable moments of dressing, I committed eighty to memory and my friend no fewer. Many years afterwards he told me that he believed himself to have derived more benefit from this exercise than from any two years of his college course. Certainly in my opinion no other body of poetry in the language is so precious for internal possession. Had any one else written these Sonnets than the author of "Lear," "Macbeth," "Hamlet," and "Othello," they

would be universally acknowledged as one of the chief glories of English literature. Those gigantic growths have cast some shade on this bed of violets. Yet the wise ones know, and a small band addicted to the Sonnets makes a hushed company of almost religious devotees. This veneration I share, believing Wordsworth right when he declared that "in no part of the writings of this poet is found in an equal compass a greater number of exquisite feelings felicitously expressed." Shelley, too, recommended these pieces as "a whetstone for dull intelligences." If one were merely seeking instruction in the technique of verse, where could he so well train himself to feel the functions of alliteration, assonance, loaded or swift syllables, substitution of feet, re-

petition, end stopping and running over, varieties of pause? Let any one read the ninety-seventh Sonnet and see how its poignant matter is driven home by the vowel *e*. Let him feel the onward rush of the sixtieth, the threefold delays of the sixty-first and forty-ninth, the flutterings of heart conveyed in the double rhymes of the eighty-seventh, the calamitous crash produced by the inner rhyme near the close of the ninetieth and by the monosyllabic line of the thirtieth. But we must turn from these delicious subtleties to matters more fundamental.

Of the facts in regard to Shakspeare's Sonnets little need be said. Little indeed is known. The Sonnets were first printed in 1609, when their author was forty-five years old. How

much earlier they were written we can only guess. Meres mentions in 1598 that Shakspeare was writing sonnets, and in 1599 two of them appeared in a volume of miscellaneous verse. Whether the volume of 1609 was authorized by Shakspeare is uncertain. A Dedication, professing to state the circumstances of publication, leaves all enigmatic. Thus it runs: "To the onlie begetter of | these insuing Sonnets | Mr. W. H. all happinesse | and that eternitie | promised | by | our ever-living poet | wisheth | the well wishing | adventurer in | setting forth. | T. T."

"T. T." is known. He was Thomas Thorpe, a London bookseller. But what does "begetter" mean? What "adventurer"? Who is "Mr. W. H."? Is he some insignificant person, or that



William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, to whom Shakspeare's fellow players fourteen years later dedicated the first folio of the plays? Is he perhaps Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom Shakspeare himself had dedicated his "Venus and Adonis" sixteen, and "Lucrece" fifteen, years earlier. And if either of these, is he also the lovely boy whom we meet everywhere in the Sonnets? Are the Sonnets in any sense autobiographic? Do we read in them actual experiences of Shakspeare's life? Or are they literary exercises, common enough among the poets of that day, who would often devise an ideal situation and, through a long sonnet sequence, spend their utmost delicacy of language in developing its emotional possibilities? To none of these ques-

tions of historic fact can a sure answer be given. They accordingly form alluring enigmas, teasing the thought of scholars as does the authorship of the "Junius Letters" or the identity of the "Man in the Iron Mask." And certainly if answers to these questions could be had, we should understand better the mysterious mind of Shakspeare. Yet I cannot help thinking that too much importance has been attached to such external and apparently insoluble problems, and that attention has thus been unduly withdrawn from the marvelous poems themselves. I at least shall leave all questions of this nature aside and concern myself with the matter of the Sonnets rather than with their origin. Let us take them at their face value, as if they had been

found on the street. They profess certain sentiments and situations which, whether fictitious or not, are of profound significance and beauty. Let us examine these.

In doing so I make four assumptions. I assume that these Sonnets fall into three contrasted and unequal groups, the first comprising the first seventeen, a second of one hundred and nine, and a final group of twenty-six. I further assume that the first two groups stand substantially in the order intended by their author. Then, thirdly, that the speaker throughout is Shakspeare himself. And lastly that the person addressed is, in the first two groups, a man ; in the last, a woman. That these assumptions have been questioned I am well aware. But time

is limited, and I do not think the evidence against them strong enough to repay discussion here.

What, then, is the theme of them all? For I hold that they have a common theme and are not a miscellaneous lot of verses. We cannot fully enjoy them until we discover such inner coherence as will let them be regarded as in a sense a single connected poem. Of course that theme is love. But in so designating it we say little. Almost every poem of power deals with some variety of love. It is the universal subject. The significant question is what aspect of it is here presented? What phase of love has so impressed Shakespeare as to give poignant unity to his work? I understand it to be the transitoriness of love. In love there is per-

petual tragedy. The loved object, so prized for what he is to-day, to-morrow is changed. Even though my devotion to him and his to me be steady, our situation is unstable. It cannot abide. The hostile force of oncoming time unceasingly intervenes and brings us alteration. Throughout the Sonnets Shakspeare is represented as engrossed with this pathetic transitoriness of love, as seeking for means to overcome it and give perpetuity to that which is so precious and so frail. Rightly does the mysterious dedication name the dominant motive of the Sonnets as a "promised eternitie." "Our everliving poet" craves immortality for the object of his passion. He, the player, the out-cast, the lonely man, aging and poor, has met a youth of noble lineage, of

wealth and influence, of singular beauty, marked with the freshness of a May morning, yet temperate and not easily moved, gay however, loved by many, and much younger than Shakspeare himself. While to this lovely boy Shakspeare's whole soul goes forth, he knows that time must ravage his extraordinary charm. That is the aspect of love which fills his mind, its transiency. He "weeps to have that which he fears to lose." The whole sonnet in which this line occurs well presents his protest against time as the arch enemy:—

When I have seen by Time's fell hand defaced  
The rich-proud cost of outworn buried age;  
When sometime lofty towers I see down-razed,  
And brass eternal slave to mortal rage;  
When I have seen the hungry ocean gain  
Advantage on the kingdom of the shore,

And the firm soil win of the watery main,  
 Increasing store with loss and loss with store;  
 When I have seen such interchange of state,  
 Or state itself confounded to decay ;  
 Ruin hath taught me thus to ruminare,  
 That Time will come and take my love away.

This thought is as a death, which cannot choose  
 But weep to have that which it fears to lose.

That is the note we have through-  
 out. Time moves resistlessly onward,  
 and all fair things, this youth of com-  
 pelling splendor among them, must  
 pass away. But while the general theme  
 is compactly stated in this sixty-fourth  
 Sonnet, its pervasiveness will better ap-  
 pear if we gather together some of the  
 disjointed cries of horror which re-  
 sound on every page : —

“ This bloody tyrant Time ” ;

“ Never-resting Time ” ;

“ Devouring Time ” ;

“ Time’s spoils ” ;

“Time’s injurious hand”;  
“Time’s thievish progress to eternity”;  
“Confounding Age’s cruel knife”;  
“Sad mortality”;  
“That churl Death”;  
“The filching age”;  
“Wasteful Time debateth with Decay”;  
“When in thee Time’s furrows I behold,  
    Then look I Death my days should expiate”;  
“No, Time, thou shalt not boast that I do  
    change”;  
“You are no longer yours than you yourself  
    here live”;  
    “Thou’rt much too fair  
To be Death’s conquest and make worms thy  
    heir”;  
“Do what e’er thou wilt, swift-footed Time,  
    To the wide world and all her changing sweets,  
    But I forbid thee one most heinous crime”;  
“I all at war with Time for love of you”;  
Thou “reckoning Time, whose millioned ac-  
    cidents  
Creep in ’twixt vows and change decrees of  
    kings,  
Tan sacred beauty, blunt the sharp’st intents,  
Divert strong minds to the course of alt’ring things.”



But one might continue indefinitely. The word "time" occurs in the Sonnets seventy-eight times; "death," twenty-one; "age," eighteen. The few denunciations here given will be sufficient to mark the foe against whom Shakspeare contends.

At first it might seem that there is no use in contention. This foe is one who cannot be vanquished. We can only submit. Inevitably "time will come and take our love away." But may not an expedient be found for circumventing time? As I understand them, this is the problem agitated throughout the Sonnets. It forms their very ground plan. With this in mind the whole one hundred and fifty-two will be seen to gain substantial unity. For each of the three groups whose

bounds I have marked proposes a special variety of solution and sets up accordingly a different type of immortality. Nor are the three types accidental and unconnected. They come forward in logical order, the simplest first, each later one having a scope and consequence beyond its predecessor. To each of them I give a distinctive name. The first I call Natural Immortality. Borrowed from nature, it is as petty and unimportant as nature herself. The second, Ideal Immortality, is wider in scope and suggestion; and the third, Spiritual Immortality, revealed at a moment of anguish, is precise and personal as the others are not. In these three different conceptions of immortality Shakspeare takes refuge from the batterings

of time. I will consider them successively.

When we say that time engulfs all things and that the loved boy must die, the statement is not altogether true. Though the individual dies, the race survives. The family goes on unchecked by time and may continue from father to son for countless generations. Time, then, is not altogether victorious. Something endures through changing time. He who has a child survives in him. That child's child carries him onward still, and so from age to age there is continuance. In the race, the family, is a provision for permanence which cannot be swept away. Future ages may still contemplate my love, this beautiful youth, in his children. At present he is unmar-

ried, and the first set of sonnets is busied with urging the boy to marry, that the record of his beauty may not be destroyed but perpetuated in the lives of those who are to come.

Does this strike us as a trivial conception? At any rate, let it not be mistaken for an unreal one. Here, the passionate seeker for victory over time has laid hold of a solid fact, verifiable in experience. Shifting nature, the embodiment of pitiless time, is no mere lot of unrelated changes. Order is there. Changes are changes of something. Only the permanent suffers change. That distressing transiency which fills the world with lamentation is, then, largely illusory. These early sonnets, accordingly, press home upon the loved one, often in fantastic and

conceitful fashion, the importance of marriage. I read a typical sonnet in which this is urged : —

When I do count the clock that tells the time,  
 And see the brave day sunk in hideous night;  
 When I behold the violet past prime,  
 And sable curls all silver'd o'er with white;  
 When lofty trees I see barren of leaves,  
 Which erst from heat did canopy the herd,  
 And summer's green, all girded up in sheaves,  
 Borne on the bier with white and bristly beard;  
 Then of thy beauty do I question make,  
 That thou among the wastes of time must go,  
 Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,  
 And die as fast as they see others grow;  
     And nothing 'gainst Time's scythe can make  
         defence  
     Save breed, to brave him when he takes thee  
         hence.

If this twelfth Sonnet well illustrates the fervor which the thought of Natural Immortality inspires, the last of this series, the seventeenth,

may be cited for its grace and playfulness : —

Who will believe my verse in time to come,  
If it were fill'd with your most high deserts?  
Though yet, heaven knows, it is but as a tomb  
Which hides your life and shows not half your parts.  
If I could write the beauty of your eyes  
And in fresh numbers number all your graces,  
The age to come would say, "This poet lies;  
Such heavenly touches ne'er touch'd earthly faces."  
So should my papers, yellow'd with their age,  
Be scorn'd, like old men of less truth than tongue,  
And your true rights be term'd a poet's rage  
And stretchèd metre of an antique song.

But were some child of yours alive that time,  
You should live twice, in it and in my rime.

I have no need, however, to expand the thought as Shakspeare does. It is too meagre and elementary to benefit by expansion. The group in which it is elaborated is the shortest of the three. But the same thought appears

in Shakspeare's other poems and in the plays which probably were written at about this time, showing that it was then much in his mind. Here, for instance, is a passage from the "Venus and Adonis": —

Upon the earth's increase why shouldst thou feed  
Unless the earth with thy increase be fed?  
By law of nature thou art bound to breed,  
That thine may live when thou thyself art dead.  
And so, in spite of death, thou dost survive,  
In that thy likeness still is left alive.

The appearance of the theme in "Venus and Adonis" is the more noteworthy because in the fifty-third Sonnet Shakspeare writes, addressing the beautiful youth, —

Describe Adonis, and the counterfeit  
Is poorly imitated after you.

It would seem, then, that the Sonnets are closely related to "Venus and

Adonis" and that in the passage on "breed," just quoted from the latter, Shakspeare is thinking of the lustrous and childless young man. A passage in "Twelfth Night" states the same thought in feminine form:—

Lady, you are the cruell'st she alive  
If you will lead these graces to the grave  
And leave the world no copy.

Yet must we not feel that Shakspeare is deluding himself with this notion of Natural Immortality? Fact though it be, it cannot prevent change, preserve the loved object, and have consolatory value for him who is assailed by time. The youth does not survive, but only his copy, the child, or rather that fictitious entity, his line of children. Over the individual time has its victory. The youth must go. Another



shall take his place. But for the hungry heart no substitute is sufficient.

Perhaps Shakspeare became aware of this. At any rate, with the ending of this group of Sonnets its whole theme entirely disappears. Nowhere afterwards is it mentioned. Though the fortieth Sonnet contains an allusion to a delayed marriage, the passage has no reference to time or immortality. What is the reason for such sudden silence? Did the youth marry? Or did Shakspeare perceive how unsatisfactory such hopes are? We do not know. I am inclined, however, to think that of the two the latter is more likely, because even while the conception of Natural Immortality is weighty in Shakspeare's mind and he is trying to believe that later generations will

behold what he beholds, he finds himself led on to a conception more significant. The first hint of it is contained in the fifteenth Sonnet :—

X When I consider everything that grows  
Holds in perfection but a little moment;  
That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows  
Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;  
When I perceive that men as plants increase,  
Cheerèd 'and check'd even by the self-same sky,  
Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,  
And wear their brave state out of memory;  
Then the conceit of this inconstant stay  
Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,  
Where wasteful Time debateth with decay,  
To change your day of youth to sullied night;  
And all in war with Time for love of you,  
As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

“I engraft you new.” “I have power to confer immortality on him I love. Through me his beauty shall be perpetuated long after time alone would bring it to dust.” This is the thought

which now takes possession of Shakspeare and becomes the leading motive of the long second group. I call it Ideal Immortality, in contrast with Natural, because the youth is to be immortalized through Shakspeare's verse. So long as men think, read, love, follow beauty, this exquisite boy shall be their companion. But while this thought underlies the whole second series, it is not specifically announced in every sonnet. On the contrary, there are considerable stretches which contain no mention of it. The group is the longest of the three, containing more than a hundred sonnets. In them we hear of the changing events and the vicissitudes of affection which went on during more than three years. Several journeys are mentioned, what is mem-

orable in them being not the places visited — these are not even named — but the grievous separation from the loved youth. Then come disturbances of that love, the more serious being those specifically treated in the third section of the Sonnets. Distrust, too, and jealousy arise. A rival poet — Chapman, Daniel, or some one whom we do not know — begins to praise the youth, and Shakspeare fears he may himself be supplanted in the youth's regard. Of his own inferiority he is painfully aware. He wishes he had his rival's poetic power. He is ashamed of his poverty and his connection with the stage. He disparages his personal appearance, his years, his talents, the fewness of his friends, and his slender opportunities. He knows how unim-

portant and incidental he must be in the rich life of the one who is all the world to him. Yet love of that exalted one brings such solace to his distressful moods that the prevailing tone of this second group is one of gladness. 1

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes  
 I all alone bewEEP my outcast state,  
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
 And look upon myself and curse my fate,  
 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,  
 Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,  
 Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,  
 With what I most enjoy contented least. \  
 Yet in these thoughts/myself almost despising,  
 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,/  
 Like to the lark at break of day arising  
 From sullen earth,/sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
     For thy sweet love remember'd—such wealth  
         brings  
     That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Multifarious, then, are the topics of this second series. Yet there is unity

too here. The ominous note which unified the first series, dread of the vicissitudes of time, organizes this second also. How to exclude change from the field of love is still the problem, only a new solution is proposed. Intelligence and not heredity is now believed to possess preserving power. Remembrance can be fixed with such literary precision that then just this youth and not merely his descendants shall endure from age to age. Such immortality Shakspeare is sure he can bestow. To it he repeatedly returns, declaring it to be that which prompts him to the writing of sonnets. Superb, indeed, is the confidence with which he promises the young man that through him he shall abide forever. Consider a few of his audacious utterances:—

60 Like as the waves make towards the pebbled shore,  
 So do our minutes hasten to their end ;  
 Each changing place with that which goes before,  
 In sequent toil all forwards do contend.  
 Nativity, once in the main of light,  
 Crawls to maturity, wherewith being crown'd,  
 Crooked eclipses 'gainst his glory fight,  
 And Time that gave doth now his gift confound.  
 Time doth transfix the flourish set on youth,  
 And delves the parallels in beauty's brow ;  
 Feeds on the rarities of nature's truth,  
 And nothing stands but for his scythe to mow ;  
     And yet to times in hope my verse shall stand,  
     Praising thy worth, despite his cruel hand.

Since brass, nor stone, nor earth, nor boundless  
     sea,

65 But sad mortality o'ersways their power,  
 How with this rage shall beauty hold a plea,  
 Whose action is no stronger than a flower ?  
 O, how shall summer's honey breath hold out  
 Against the wreckful siege of battering days,  
 When rocks impregnable are not so stout,  
 Nor gates of steel so strong, but Time decays ?  
 O fearful meditation ! where, alack,  
 Shall Time's best jewel from Time's quest lie hid ?

Or what strong hand can hold his swift foot back?

Or who his spoil of beauty can forbid?

O, none, unless this miracle have might,

That in black ink my love may still shine  
bright.

81

Or I shall live your epitaph to make,

Or you survive when I in earth am rotten ;

From hence your memory death cannot take,

Although in me each part will be forgotten.

Your name from hence immortal life shall have,

Though I, once gone, to all the world must die ;

The earth can yield me but a common grave,

When you entombèd in men's eyes shall lie.

Your monument shall be my gentle verse,

Which eyes not yet created shall o'er-read ;

And tongues to be your being shall rehearse,

When all the breathers of this world are dead ;

You still shall live — such virtue hath my pen —

Where breath most breathes, even in the mouths  
of men.

The fact, too, that Shakspeare's  
guardianship of his friend thus  
stretches through future ages brings



fresh assurance against variations of the present. In a sonnet which may originally have stood at the close of this series he contrasts ideal and enduring love with that which is dependent on time and circumstance :—

Let me not to the marriage of true minds  
Admit impediments. Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds,  
Or bends with the remover to remove :  
O, no ! it is an ever-fixèd mark,  
That looks on tempests and is never shaken ;  
It is the star to every wandering bark,  
Whose worth 's unknown, although his height be  
taken.

Love 's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and  
cheeks

Within his bending sickle's compass come ;  
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,  
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

If this be error, and upon me proved,  
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

“Love's not Time's fool!” Tri-

umphant cry ! Shakspeare has discovered factors in life potent over change and chance.

Such is the larger hope of immortality now grasped by Shakspeare and held as that through which the individual, and not merely the species, survives. It is grounded in the reality of the ideal. When actual existence is ended, a prized and glorified remembrance, an ideal presentation of him who is done with time, remains. Once feeling, too, this reverence for the ideal and its superiority to the real, Shakspeare is led on to see traces of it everywhere. Throughout this series nothing is spoken of in terms of fact or as possessing value in itself, but only as reflecting some aspect of the all-permeating friend:—

## SHAKSPERE'S SONNETS 37

From you have I been absent in the spring,  
 When proud-pied April, dress'd in all his trim,  
 Hath put a spirit of youth in everything,  
 That heavy Saturn laugh'd and leap'd with him.  
 Yet nor the lays of birds, nor the sweet smell  
 Of different flowers in odour and in hue,  
 Could make me any summer's story tell,  
 Or from their proud lap pluck them where they  
     grew ;

Nor did I wonder at the lily's white,  
 Nor praise the deep vermilion in the rose ;  
 They were but sweet, but figures of delight  
 Drawn after you, you pattern of all those.  
     Yet seem'd it winter still, and, you away,  
     As with your shadow I with these did play.

The forward violet thus did I chide :  
 Sweet thief, whence didst thou steal thy sweet  
     that smells,  
 If not from my love's breath ? The purple pride  
 Which on thy soft cheek for complexion dwells  
 In my love's veins thou hast too grossly dyed.  
 The lily I condemnèd for thy hand,  
 And buds of marjoram had stol'n thy hair ;  
 The roses fearfully on thorns did stand,  
 One blushing shame, another white despair ;

A third, nor red nor white, had stol'n of both,  
And to his robbery had annex'd thy breath ;  
But, for his theft, in pride of all his growth  
A vengeful canker ate him up to death.

More flowers I noted, yet I none could see  
But sweet or colour it had stol'n from thee.

Present realities are disparaged, or valued only because they reflect, however imperfectly, one more perfect than themselves. A similar process of idealization is applied to the past. All beauty recorded there is but prophecy of the radiant youth.

When in the chronicle of wasted Time  
I see descriptions of the fairest wights,  
And beauty making beautiful old rime  
In praise of ladies dead and lovely knights,  
Then, in the blazon of sweet beauty's best,  
Of hand, of foot, of lip, of eye, of brow,  
I see their antique pen would have express'd  
Even such a beauty as you master now.  
So all their praises are but prophecies  
Of this our time, all you prefiguring ;

And, for they look'd but with divining eyes,  
They had not skill enough your worth to sing :  
For we, which now behold these present days,  
Have eyes to wonder, but lack tongues to  
praise.

The loved youth, in short, is identified with all that is fair, whether in the past or present, and is accordingly as secure against destruction as ideal beauty itself. But how secure is that? Does not such extreme idealism empty itself of meaning? Especially in these last exquisite sonnets, where Shakspeare allows his fancy free play, one will hardly escape a sense of artificiality. The ideal cannot in deed and truth be counted identical with the real. There is a painful difference. And when this is once felt, the whole notion of ideal immortality on which the series rests becomes suspicious. To the plain ques-

tion, Will the lovely boy triumph over time? we must honestly answer, No. For a season the memory of him may continue, but that memory is not he. Yet who is it that is loved, this veritable boy or the idea of him? Alas, it is the boy himself, who cannot survive. Ideal Immortality is something which the desolate hearts of every age have tried to comfort themselves with. In this course it has been advocated as equivalent to immortality itself. And poetic though it is, it forms indeed a good sort of secondary solace, preventing the world from seeming altogether hostile, and introducing into familiar places, now painfully vacant, a kind of communion with him who is not there. But he is not there; let us acknowledge it. No profit comes

of self-deception. Ideal Immortality expresses no fact, however pleasant a fancy it is to play with.

That fact, the reality of Individual Immortality, is not indeed a matter open to external observation. It cannot be detected in the case of another person, but must be come at in the consciousness of the man himself. The complete conception of immortality—at least, Spiritual Immortality, in which we know ourselves as moral beings, capable of commanding time and circumstance instead of accepting their compulsions — is something which cannot be imparted, but must be reached in a person's own experience. The third group of Sonnets to which we now turn records such an experience of Shakspeare's.

It shows him at a time of bitter temptation—yes, of monstrous and degrading sin; for even while dedicated to lofty things by love of the beautiful youth, he yields to the allurements of a woman whom he despises. She possesses little physical attraction other than her bewitching eyes, has coarse dark hair and a dark complexion, both regarded as blemishes in Elizabeth's time, strikingly red lips, a voice not altogether pleasing, is older than Shakspeare, and known by him to be an adulteress already. Yet he is fascinated, fascinated even while repelled. He cannot escape from her dark eyes, imperious ways, and feminine caprices. He tells us that while "her face hath not the power to make love groan," "her will is large and spa-



cious," and she "hath the strength and warrantise of skill." She is of musical temperament and incomprehensibly dominates him, arraying him against himself as Cleopatra does Marc Antony. It is a squalid story. With one side of his nature he knows that all that is of worth in him is destroyed by contact with her; with another he feels there is no life for him except in her presence. But she is not content with his single abasement. She seeks the friend too, and, as Shakspeare believes, with success :—

Two loves I have of comfort and despair,  
Which like two spirits do suggest me still:  
The better angel is a man right fair,  
The worser spirit a woman colour'd ill.  
To win me soon to hell, my female evil  
Tempteth my better angel from my side,  
And would corrupt my saint to be a devil,  
Wooing his purity with her foul pride.

And whether that my angel be turn'd fiend  
Suspect I may, yet not directly tell;  
But being both from me, both to each friend,  
I guess one angel in another's hell;  
Yet this shall I ne'er know, but live in doubt,  
Till my bad angel fire my good one out.

This alienation of the friend through the machinations of the dark lady is already touched on in the preceding series of sonnets, especially in those from thirty-three to forty-two and from ninety-two to ninety-six. But wherever it is mentioned little blame is attached to the youth. Shakspeare's horror is directed almost entirely against himself, that he could be base enough to be enslaved by one so worthless. He is astonished and afflicted. Yet it is the very sense of this inner tragedy as constituting the essence of sin which gradually brings him to an un-

derstanding of Spiritual Immortality. The story of his misery and of his ultimate hope of relief forms the subject of the final series of sonnets, though here it is not probable that the separate pieces have been printed in their original order.

At the beginning, when Shakspeare first sees the dark lady seated at her spinnet, there is no thought of misery. All is gladness and the sense of incoming life:—

How oft, when thou, my music, music play'st,  
 Upon that blessèd wood whose motion sounds  
 With thy sweet fingers, when thou gently sway'st  
 The wiry concord that mine ear confounds,  
 Do I envy those jacks that nimble leap  
 To kiss the tender inward of thy hand,  
 Whilst my poor lips, which should that harvest  
     reap,

At the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand!  
 To be so tickled, they would change their state

And situation with those dancing chips,  
O'er whom thy fingers walk with gentle gait,  
Making dead wood more bless'd than living lips.

Since saucy jacks so happy are in this,  
Give them thy fingers, me thy lips to kiss.

But as the affair proceeds, an inner  
conflict is disclosed and inward bitter-  
ness : —

My love is as a fever, longing still  
For that which longer nurseth the disease ;  
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,  
Th' uncertain sickly appetite to please.  
My reason, the physician to my love,  
Angry that his prescriptions are not kept,  
Hath left me, and I desperate now approve  
Desire is death, which physic did except.  
Past cure I am, now reason is past care,  
And frantic-mad with evermore unrest ;  
My thoughts and my discourse as madmen's  
are,  
At random from the truth vainly express'd ;  
For I have sworn thee fair and thought thee  
bright,  
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.

The expense of spirit in a waste of shame  
 Is lust in action ; and till action, lust  
 Is perjured, murderous, bloody, full of blame,  
 Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust ;  
 Enjoy'd no sooner but despisèd straight ;  
 Past reason hunted ; and no sooner had,  
 Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,  
 On purpose laid to make the taker mad ;  
 Mad in pursuit, and in possession so ;  
 Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme ;  
 A bliss in proof ; and proved, a very woe ;  
 Before, a joy proposed ; behind, a dream.

All this the world well knows ; yet none knows  
 well

To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.

In this last sonnet is the lowest depth to which Shakspeare describes himself as sinking. And precisely here, in the intensity and bewilderment of sin, the possibility of a Spiritual Immortality is revealed. Within himself he discovers an immortal nature at issue with the forces of mortality. A

true self is set in contrast with the changing, conflicting, enslaving passions. Of these "rebel powers," the expression only of time and sense, he can now say with the Apostle: "They are not I, but sin that dwelleth in me." In the one hundred and forty-sixth Sonnet, which might well stand as the conclusion of the entire series, he speaks out with extraordinary fervor and precision his hope of victory over these "hours of dross":—

Poor soul, the centre of my sinful earth,  
Fool'd by these rebel powers that thee array,  
Why dost thou pine within and suffer dearth,  
Painting thy outward walls so costly gay?  
Why so large cost, having so short a lease,  
Dost thou upon thy fading mansion spend?  
Shall worms, inheritors of this excess,  
Eat up thy charge? Is this thy body's end?  
Then, soul, live thou upon thy servant's loss,  
And let that pine, to aggravate thy store;

Buy terms divine in selling hours of dross;  
Within be fed, without be rich no more.

So shalt thou feed on Death, that feeds on men,  
And, Death once dead, there 's no more dying  
then.

Here is Spiritual Immortality. Man is a spirit, no mere creature of circumstance, passive, instantaneous, dependent on alien forces within and without, which sweep him along their blind current, regardless of any good of his own. He is an active being, dictatorial over time and circumstance, with power to compel chance and change to work for his permanent welfare. Such an understanding of immortality, grounded in the nature of personality, gives a hope more specific than the Ideal Immortality of fame, more humanly significant than the Natural Immortality of "breed."

But as I thus formulate Shakspeare's contribution to our knowledge of the momentous problem which this lectureship was founded to discuss, I suspect my hearers must often have questioned whether I am drawing my three-fold doctrine from the Sonnets themselves or am reading it into them. Did Shakspeare plan anything of that sort? Did he mean to announce a theological doctrine with three stages of successively larger hope? No; he certainly never meant that, but nevertheless it meant him. And just because he had not intended to be a philosophic teacher, but gave his mind whole-heartedly to the lovely boy and his own temptation, I have thought him a suitable person to invite to this platform. We treat immortality too much as an

.



affair of abstract speculation. But if it possesses any worth, it must be discoverable among the concrete experiences of life and there be a covert force operating on us at all times. Perhaps we can best understand it by approaching somebody who does not understand it and studying how it gets its hold on him. For this purpose I summon Shakspeare. Few writers of our language, I suppose, are so little theological as he; few so little disposed to report their own beliefs. He is therefore an unbiased and typical witness to the necessity and meaning of immortality. In the exigencies of the day he has come upon it. Mortality has proved unthinkable. He has been unable to state his deepest experiences except in terms of permanence. Whether the story related

is fact or fiction makes no difference. Its likeness to reality is gained — as in human intercourse generally — only through treating its characters as immortal beings. That I have given his underlying assumptions undue prominence, I fully admit. Shakspeare's attention was not fixed on them, as I desire yours to be. It was busy with a multi-colored life in which single events stood out more strongly than embodied principles. I have accordingly announced in my title that these guiding thoughts appear only as "intimations." Yet it cannot be too insist-  
ently asserted that they form the very  
framework of the Sonnets, and that  
English criticism has too long passed them by while busying itself about the identity of "Mr. W. H." Whoever he

was, the poems get their universal human worth from the fact that Shakspeare, brooding over the love of his friend, encounters perplexities of time and eternity. His theme is the same as that of "Lycidas," "Adonais," "In Memoriam," "Thyrsis." These anxious and sorrowing lovers, shocked by the onslaughts of time, grope after a vision of immortality and undogmatically disclose to us what each severally finds.

Some of my hearers may be disposed to ask whether "that eternitie promised by our ever-living poet" was actually secured. Taking up the forms of immortality here intimated, can we call Shakspeare successful in ultimately attaining any of the three? Hardly, I think ; at least the scanty evidence is

chiefly of a negative kind. For first, the young man is to marry and be perpetuated through a long line of descendants. Later ages will understand his beauty through his offspring. Was it so? Apparently not. We do not learn whether he married and had children. But if he did, "breed" did not save him. His son has been lost in the undistinguished mass of mankind and bears no marks of his father.

But ideas are trustier than nature, and surely Shakspeare has been successful in giving the beautiful boy Ideal Immortality? Not at all. We do not know who he was. His name perished before it was ever uttered, and has been for three centuries a subject of eager dispute. Perhaps it was Pembroke,

perhaps Southampton, perhaps one of a multitude of less famous claimants. We are not likely ever to learn. Yet Shakspeare may have wished to hide the name the better to perpetuate the character, and in these Sonnets the portrait stands as magical and lasting as Leonardo's Mona Lisa. Magical indeed it is, but indistinct in every feature. Of his appearance, interests, characteristics, or circumstances, almost nothing is told. That he was beautiful and loved is substantially all. His hair was like marjoram buds, whatever color that may be. There are hints of wealth and high station. If he was pleased to have Shakspeare address him these subtle verses, he had intellectual tastes. But how shadowy a figure ! No personal traits, no glimpses of feature, no

casual incidents have come down to us. Even the type of his beauty is unreported. It is strange. Repeatedly Shakspeare declares his purpose of immortalizing his friend ; but fails to do so, takes indeed no steps to accomplish it, and merely immortalizes the friendship. The portrait given shows only such generalized outlines as those of Shelley's Keats and has none of the specific individuality which Tennyson gave Hallam. The praise of the boy therefore survives, his praiser will never die, but the boy himself is gone.

And then the third, the culminating ideal. Shakspeare saw his passions to be matters of a moment, and so by contrast became aware of an imperial Self which could not be subjected to temporary influences without shame.

He felt through all his earthly dress  
Bright shoots of everlastingness.

Was he true to that deep insight?  
Through its light was he able to picture so clearly the long line of diversified human beings with which he has enriched the world? Or did he lose himself again in solicitations of the flesh? Who but himself can say? Once at least, we know, he looked into immortality.

THE END

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